

GEORGIA UPDATE

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Happy Holidays & Warmest Wishes for a Peaceful 2011!

Georgia Update will take a holiday break and will appear next on January 6, 2011



President Saakashvili mourned the sudden death this week of US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. "With the passing of Ambassador Holbrooke, the world has lost a rare peacemaker, his country has lost a champion of American values in the world, a great American, and I have lost a trusted friend and confidant," he said. The President noted that Holbrooke had "changed the shape of Georgian history," adding: "For the people of Georgia, Ambassador Holbrooke was more than a reliable ally in Washington—he was a man who cared deeply about our young democracy and who understood Georgia's potential as an ally of the United States." *Photo by Irakli Gedenidze/AFP/Getty Images*

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WASHINGTON POST: John McCain on Russia & Georgia

LIBÉRATION: A Russian hand in bomb attacks in Georgia

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AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: NATO's E. Europe plans amid Russia fears

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GUERNICA: Rebecca Gould interviews the descendants of Titsian Tabidze

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"There is no other country at the moment where more people see a decrease in corruption in their country, and where more people say the government is effective in fighting corruption."

"I think this is an indication that the Georgian government's efforts to fight petty corruption have been very successful. What is outstanding in Georgia compared to the other newly independent states is the amount of people who say that they have paid a bribe in the past 12 months. In Georgia, this number is very, very low—it's only 3 percent...that is remarkable."

—Transparency International senior analyst Mathias Huter on Georgia's ranking last week as the world's leading anti-corruption reformer

"Our allies in central and eastern Europe view Georgia as a test case of whether the US will stand by them or not. Russia views Georgia as a test case, too—of how much it can get away with in Georgia, and if there then elsewhere."

"Despite the constant threat from Russia, Georgia is deepening its democracy and growing its economy.... President Saakashvili even renounced the use of force to end Russia's occupation, pledging only to defend non-occupied Georgia in the event of a Russian attack."

—US Senator John McCain, speaking Dec. 10 at Johns Hopkins University

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Feb. 4-6: Munich Security conference

Feb. 25: FM Vashadze in Czech Republic

Dec. 6-7: OSCE Ministerial Council in Vilnius

TOP STORIES

Georgia Hailed by Transparency International as World's Leading Anti-Corruption Reformer

Transparency International has ranked Georgia as the world's leading anti-corruption reformer, bestowing it with the highest score of all 86 countries surveyed. As corruption rises worldwide amidst the global economic crisis, Georgia is the exception. TI's annual "2010 Global Corruption Barometer" report found that an astonishing 78 percent of Georgians say they have seen a decrease in corruption. TI's public opinion poll also shows that 77 percent of respondents deemed the government's efforts in fighting corruption to be "effective." TI says the statistical data attests to the fact that a remarkable transformation has taken place over the past several years in Georgia as the government has pursued aggressive anti-corruption reforms in the public sector.

"There is no other country at the moment where more people see a decrease in corruption in their country, and where more people say the government is effective in fighting corruption," said Mathias Huter, a senior analyst with TI's Georgia office. "I think this is an indication that the Georgian government's efforts to fight petty corruption have been very successful."

Georgia's anti-corruption achievements also stand out in comparison with other newly independent states, where corruption remains endemic. In Russia, for example, only 26 percent of people surveyed say the state has been effective in battling corruption. In Ukraine, the percentage is only 16 percent. "What is outstanding in Georgia compared to the other newly independent states is the amount of people who say that they have paid a bribe in the past 12 months," Huter said. "In Georgia, this number is very, very low—it's only 3 percent of the people surveyed. So this is definitely a number that is remarkable for the region."

[TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL: Global Corruption Barometer RFE: As Corruption Rises Worldwide, Georgia Proves the Exception](#)

European Parliament Passes Visa Facilitation, Readmission Agreements With Georgia

Georgian citizens will be able to get EU entry visas more easily after the European Parliament on Tuesday approved a new visa agreement with Georgia. MEPs also backed an agreement with Tbilisi on the readmission of irregular immigrants. The visa accord will simplify the documents required for Georgian nationals who want a short-term visa for the EU. Also, application procedures will be simplified and many Georgians will not be required to pay a visa fee, including example students, journalists, pensioners, children below the age of 12, disabled people, close relatives of Georgian citizens legally residing in an EU Member State, and civil society leaders. The readmission agreement, meanwhile, requires Georgia and the EU to take back any of their nationals who are in an irregular situation on their territories. Nationals of third countries and stateless persons will also have to be taken back if the person holds a visa for the signatory state or has resided or transited through that country. In a debate held on Monday evening, MEP Nathalie Griesbeck said the agreements represent a way of "encouraging Georgia to implement all the necessary reforms (...) in liberty, security and justice and also to combat clandestine migration."

[EUP: Green light for visa and readmission accords with Georgia](#)

Russia Stations Smertsch Missile Launchers in S. Ossetia

Despite sharp international criticism, Moscow disclosed last week that it has deployed Smertsch rocket launchers in a Russian-occupied area of Georgia. According to a Russian army spokesman, a rocket artillery unit equipped with Smertsch, or "tornado," systems was stationed in S. Ossetia. The Georgian foreign ministry strongly condemned the further military escalation in the occupied territories, saying it significantly raises the threat Russia posed to Georgia. With a firing range of 90 kilometers, the Smertsch missiles constitute an offensive weapon and fall under the limitations set by the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

[DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: Russia posts missile launchers](#)

As Geneva Talks Continue, Georgia's Non-Use-of-Force Pledge Hailed for Creating Positive New Context

Georgia's unilateral declaration on non-use of force creates a new context to resolve the conflict between Russia and Georgia, said the co-chairs of the Geneva peace talks in the run-up to this week's 14th round of discussion. "The statement by President Saakashvili is an important initiative," said Pierre Morel, the EU's special representative to the talks. "It is interesting to see that it led the other participants [in the Geneva talks] to react positively and we have now an expanded base for our work." He said Georgia's pledge marked significant progress in the process, noting: "One year ago, this kind of approach was considered by some as just impossible." Setting the stage for the next step in the talks, Morel underscored that the Georgian pledge should now lead the establishment of international security arrangements. "If partners, interlocutors are ready to commit themselves, they also look into the modalities in which this can be secured and can be prevented from non-compliance or failure," he said.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: "New Context" for Geneva Talks](#)

President Saakashvili on Passing of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke: A "Rare Peacemaker" & Champion of Georgia

President Saakashvili mourned the death Tuesday of US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. "The world has lost a rare peacemaker, his country has lost a champion of American values in the world, a great American, and I have lost a trusted friend and confidant," the President said. "For the people of Georgia, Ambassador Holbrooke was more than a reliable ally in Washington—he was a man who cared deeply about our young democracy and who understood Georgia's potential as an ally of the United States." He recalled Holbrooke's extraordinary career dating back to the Vietnam war and lamented the consequences of his loss. "It is tragic to think what might have been if he had another five years to work toward the cause of peace in Afghanistan," the President said. "Or perhaps those five years might have been enough time to help forge a lasting peace here in the Caucasus based on the principles of democracy, human rights, and international law that he championed all his life." The President also spoke of Holbrooke's critical role in Georgia-US ties: "His belief in Georgia's ability to be a partner of NATO and the US led to Georgia's 'Holbrooke Brigade,' which serves in Afghanistan and stands as a testament to his quest to build American alliances and ensure that nations with similar values were able to serve as partners on the front lines of this century's fight for freedom." In closing his appreciation of the courageous diplomat Saakashvili said: "We were so very grateful for his invaluable guidance, support, friendship and we will do whatever we can to support his legacy of peace and justice throughout the world."

**The Traditional New Year Tree of Georgia**

Vendors at a Tbilisi street market sell traditional Georgian New Year tree, the "chichilaki." Traditionally, the trees are burned after the New Year in hope that, together with the smoke, all bad memories will disappear, too.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WASHINGTON POST: John McCain on Russia & Georgia

"We need to begin dealing with Russia more as the modest power it is, not the great power it once was," Senator McCain said in a speech last week. "For starters, we need to resume the sale of defensive arms to Georgia. Our allies in central and eastern Europe view Georgia as a test case of whether the US will stand by them or not," he said.

"Russia views Georgia as a test case, too—of how much it can get away with in Georgia, and if there then elsewhere." Said McCain: "It is the policy of our government to support Georgia's aspiration to join NATO. And yet for two years, mostly out of deference to Russia, defensive arms sales have not been authorized for Georgia. This has to change. At a minimum we should provide Georgia with early warning radars and other basic capabilities to strengthen its defenses."

voices.washingtonpost.com

LIBÉRATION: A Russian hand in bomb attacks in Georgia

After the arrest of six individuals linked to a Russian officer, Georgia sees the hand of Moscow in a series of six explosions in the country in the last few months. The interior ministry last week claimed that a Russian military intelligence officer paid a Georgian citizen for the latter to conduct a series of bomb attacks. The case will not improve relations between Russia and Georgia, relations that have been tense ever since Russia's invasion in August 2008. Yet Georgia made the commitment, last month, of not using force to restore its authority over the territories lost during the conflict.

www.liberation.fr

NEW YORK TIMES: Georgia arrests six people in bombings

Georgian officials last week stopped short of accusing Moscow of ordering a series of scattered bombings, but said they were seeking its assistance in questioning the Russian officer, Maj. Yevgeny Borisov, who is stationed in Abkhazia. Shota Utiashvili, the head of analysis for the interior ministry, said he believed that Georgia would formally ask Russia to assist in the investigation during talks in Geneva later this month. "All the signs which our law enforcement has to follow indicate that these people were controlled from the occupied territories of Georgia," President Saakashvili said, adding that the arrests staved off "very serious threats of terror attacks."

www.nytimes.com

LE MONDE: Russian officer suspected of playing part Georgia bombings

Georgian authorities last week confirmed the arrest of six individuals having taken part in a recent series of bombings in Georgia. According to Georgia's interior ministry, the suspects are Georgian citizens who have admitted to receiving their orders, plans of attack, and explosives from a Russian officer, Yevgeny Borisov, who is currently serving in the Russian-occupied Georgian territory Abkhazia and was part of the Russian "peace mission" there in 2008.

www.lemonde.fr

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: NATO's E. Europe plans amid Russia fears

Painful memories were stirred in the Baltic states—all former Soviet republics—as Russian troops poured into Georgia in August 2008, US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks show. "Events in Georgia have dominated the news and discussion here like few other events in recent memory," said a cable from the American embassy in Riga. Latvians, at least ethnic Latvians, "look at Georgia and think that this could easily be them," said the dispatch, one of some 250,000 US diplomatic cables leaked to whistleblower website WikiLeaks and now being slowly released in small batches.

www.afp.com

WEEKLY STANDARD: Russia waged a covert war against Georgia since 2004

Russia waged a covert war against Georgia that included missile attacks, arms shipments to anti-government rebels and car bombings since 2004, a newly disclosed US embassy cable says. Further leaked cables show that Russia continues to flout the 2008 ceasefire agreement brokered by France's Sarkozy: Russian troops aren't just massing inside the occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia, they're actively running military patrols inside sovereign Georgian territory, Eli Lake of the *Washington Times* reported last week. Lake's piece is a narrative buster. For the past two years, a growing false narrative has emerged about how the Russian invasion was morally reprehensible but ultimately "provoked by the Georgians." This is concrete evidence that in the face of assassinations, gunship attacks, sabotage, and other deliberate acts of war, the Georgians showed an amazing level of restraint.

www.weeklystandard.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: NATO demonstrates full support for Georgia

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly last month adopted a resolution that is highly favorable to Georgia. Nonetheless, Georgia remains vulnerable. What Tbilisi needs most is greater US and European engagement in resolving its outstanding problems with Moscow. Now that Georgia has vowed that it has no plans to end the Russian occupation by military means, the undeclared Western arms embargo against Tbilisi must, logically, end and the country should be provided with sophisticated defenses to further diminish the risk of a new invasion. But even more importantly, the patience and maturity of the Georgian government must be rewarded by more closely embracing the country and, perhaps the entire S. Caucasus region.

www.jamestown.org

LE FIGARO: Tbilisi converts to realism

Facing the Russians who wish to control the southern flank of the Caucasus at any cost, the Georgian president has chosen to extend an olive branch. It is a gamble to save what can be saved. Yet, on the ground, the temporary is lasting. Now seven years after the "Rose Revolution," the ball is in Moscow's court, and it will have to give an answer to Georgia's offer. "The Russians consider Georgia and Ukraine as their best colonies, Russia's last frontiers, without which there would be no more possibility of modernizing the empire," said Giga Bokeria, head of Georgia's National Security Council, on the Kremlin's objectives to keep Georgia within the Russian sphere of influence.

www.lefigaro.fr

EURASIANET: Give Tbilisi a Millennium Challenge second chance

The board of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, an independent US aid agency, will soon pass judgment on Georgia. Although located in a rough neighborhood, Georgia has been one of the most successful countries in the world in fighting corruption and fostering economic development. It has been successfully bringing to a close the infrastructure projects outlined in its first compact. When it meets the month, the Millennium Challenge board should recognize the progress that Georgia has made and award it a second compact.

www.eurasianet.org

GUERNICA: Interviews with the descendants of Titsian Tabidze, Georgian literary modernity was liquidated by the Soviet state from the 1930s onwards. Already in 1925, Georgian poet Titsian Tabidze could detect signs of boding disaster under the Soviet rule. Luckily for us, fear did not keep Titsian from writing. If anything, fear emboldened him with greater clarity and courage. If he was going to die anyway, Titsian knew he had little to lose by honesty.

www.guernicamag.com